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**THE UNITED STATES, JAPAN, AND AUSTRALIA: SECURITY LINKAGES TO
SOUTHEAST ASIA**

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The United States, Japan, and Australia have been described as the post-Cold War democratic neo-liberal anchors for Asia-Pacific security. This description seems apt because liberal capitalist democracies depend on open trade and investment for growth and prosperity. Nevertheless, strategic imperatives for the three allies differ: the United States is a global power with concomitant security interests of which the Asia-Pacific is a single—albeit very important—component; Japan is a major Asian economic player whose security concerns have focused on its Northeast Asian neighbors; and Australia, although a close American ally and friend of Japan's, is primarily involved with threats to Southeast Asian stability and the South Pacific. These differing—though not incompatible—priorities play out in their relations with Southeast Asia.

Both Australia and Japan are island nations, dependent on long, vulnerable sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Australia's primary sphere of strategic interest extends from the mid-Indian Ocean through the Straits of Malacca and South China Sea to the Southwest Pacific. Japan's SLOCs are encompassed by Australia's. Both the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and Japan's Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) maintain P-3C Orion surveillance aircraft that cover these regions, in Japan's case up to the northwest Pacific and the East China Sea. The two countries' air patrol craft maintain electronic data links allowing them to share information on ship movements throughout the areas of combined operations.¹ Of course, the U.S. Seventh Fleet also patrols these areas.

The Southeast Asian Ten—ASEAN—have evolved over 40 years from mercantilist to essentially open and outward oriented polities. Their security situation

in the early 21st century is less fear of conventional military threats from neighboring countries than new challenges frequently referred to as “non-traditional threats,” including infectious diseases, piracy, terrorism, drug and human trafficking, and international crime. While the United States retains its Cold War alliances in Southeast Asia (Thailand and the Philippines), these have been modified and supplemented post 9/11 to become “coalitions of the willing,” states that coalesce around specific common security practices such as the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and the Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI)—to be discussed below. While Southeast Asian states preserve long standing security ties with the United States, they are wary of great power games and pursue sophisticated diplomatic strategies designed to keep all great powers involved in regional affairs while insuring none dominates. Moreover, because of all the great powers, the United States is a distant hegemon, Washington remains the balancer of choice on China’s periphery.²

The American Security Position in Southeast Asia.

In the post-9/11 world, two concerns dominate U.S. security policy for Southeast Asia: the first is a long standing commitment to maintain freedom of the SLOCs for international commerce—a public good which benefits all trading states; the second is radical Islamist terrorism, and Washington has placed a high priority on countering this threat in bilateral relations with Southeast Asia as well as in its diplomacy toward such regional organizations as ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). As William Tow and Amitav Acharya have argued, the United States has moved from alliance exclusivism to allied

coalition building that share common concerns, particularly with respect to counterterrorism. To command U.S. interest and support, Southeast Asian states are asked to demonstrate their commitment to suppressing terrorist activities within their territories.³

In effect, the United States is offering assistance to Southeast Asia partners that face internal security challenges from opposition forces that employ terrorist tactics. Tow and Acharya note: “Washington’s focus on counterterrorism has provided the Bush administration with an opportunity to pursue an egalitarian approach to bilateralism in the Asia-Pacific,” one that must demonstrate “a genuine American sensitivity to the unique insurgency and terrorist threats facing each regional ally....”⁴ Although this may be true, there is still a potential downside: the United States could become involved in the domestic politics of its Southeast Asian partners as well as in determining the legitimacy of their governments. While the Philippines to a considerable extent and Indonesia to a lesser degree welcome U.S. counterterrorism support, both Thailand and Malaysia have declined Washington’s offers of direct assistance (discussed below). Those who are reticent about direct American counterterrorist involvement were not reassured by Washington’s 2006 *National Security Strategy* document that states while diplomacy is always the preferred course of action, the U.S. will “not rule out the use of force before attacks occur, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack.”⁵

However, Southeast Asian strategists may have picked up on a subtle revision of U.S. strategy issued by the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) in November 2008. The new strategy, approved by Pacific Commander Admiral Timothy Keating, is

“based on partnership, presence, and military readiness.” Its predecessors were more assertive, stating that strategy was “rooted in partnership and military preeminence.” In a cover letter authorizing the new strategy, Admiral Keating explained that “it underscores the fundamental importance of sustained and persistent cooperation and collaboration in times of relative peace to mitigate situations that could lead to conflict and crisis.” Without openly saying so, the new strategy appears to abrogate American military “unilateralism” of which the Bush administration has been accused and to emphasize instead the importance of cooperative security, particularly in the face of non-traditional security threats. This new PACOM strategy also fits with the ARF’s goal of preventive diplomacy whereby countries identify and work together to resolve conflicts before they can rise to a tension level leading to open hostilities. Moreover, PACOM officers have also stated that U.S. government agencies other than Defense—the State Department, Agency for International Development, and Treasury, among others—must become more deeply involved in regional security so that the Defense Department can focus more on the military dimension. Calling for a “whole-of-government approach”, the revised strategy demands “a high degree of coordination [and] integration” across departments and agencies. Finally, the new document applauds Australia and Japan for joining the United States “in developing a trilateral partnership dedicated to improving security in the region.” At bottom, the new strategy constitutes another assurance to Asia that PACOM remains “an engaged and trusted partner committed to preserving the security” of the region.⁶

The Trilateral Partnership in U.S.-Southeast Asian Security.

In a September 2007 Honolulu address, the U.S. Pacific Commander Admiral Timothy Keating stated that the United States prefers “multilateral over bilateral exercises, engagements, [and] theater security cooperation...increasingly interweaving systems....”⁶ This security conception underpins Washington’s interest in the trilateral dialogue. Initial discussions among the United States, Australia, and Japan took place at the Hanoi ARF meeting and Australia-U.S. ministerial dialogue, both convened in July 2001. Although Australia and Japan had close bilateral security relations with the United States prior to the 2001 discussions, Canberra and Tokyo had few security links with each other, a notable exception being the RIMPAC naval exercises. By 2005, the trilateral dialogue was raised to the ministerial level. Although the dialogue covers a variety of topics, from a Southeast Asian perspective, the most salient topics include terrorism, WMD proliferation, and preparation for possible pandemics. Nevertheless, most Southeast Asian governments express little interest in the dialogue. If anything, some view the meetings as efforts by wealthy, developed powers outside Southeast Asia to devise an alternative to the impotent ARF that is dominated by ASEAN.⁷

Australia in particular has developed bilateral security dialogues with Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand. Additionally Malaysian and Singapore defense relations with Canberra go back decades through the Five Power Defense Arrangement. Moreover, Australia has signed counterterrorism memoranda with Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines; and through APEC, the three dialogue partners and Southeast Asian states have also agreed to counterterrorism action plans related to international trade. (Only Malaysia has objected to APEC’s

counterterrorism requirements, complaining the organization is moving beyond its commercial mandate.)⁸

The Australia-Japan defense relationship was significantly strengthened with a 2003 Memorandum of Understanding that regularized defense departments' consultation and coordination. Joint naval exercises constitute the dominant form, and the two defense forces have also worked together in Cambodian peacekeeping (1992-1993) and in East Timor where Japan Self Defense Force (JSDF) engineers have engaged in reconstruction. Additionally, Japanese personnel have been involved in monitoring developments in Aceh and offering an aid package to the Philippines in Mindanao. Moreover, Japan dispatched a thousand JSDF personnel for humanitarian assistance to Aceh after the December 2004 tsunami.⁹

The 2009 Japan-Australia Declaration institutionalizes cooperation across several dimension: peacekeeping and disaster relief, joint military exercises, annual defense policy talks, and exchanges of navy and air force visits, including bilateral naval exercises. Australia also works with Japan on Psi, including a 2008 counter-WMD exercise near Japan.^{9a}

Counterterrorism: The Focal Point of Trilateral Security.

After September 11th and the 2002 Bali bombings, Australian and U.S. priorities in Southeast Asia focused single-mindedly on counterterrorism. In May 2006, Australia announced a four year \$70 million aid plan for Southeast Asia to combat terrorism. Support and training would be provided for border control, WMD surveillance, and efforts to counter terrorist propaganda. The Australian Federal

Police (AFP) would also step up law enforcement, forensics, and technical training for regional police forces. Coordinating with Canberra, the United States inaugurated a Rewards for Justice Program that allocated millions of dollars for the capture of Jemmah Islamiyah (JI) leaders who were wanted for the Bali attacks and other depredations in Indonesia and the Philippines.¹⁰

ASEAN has generally welcomed this external support, though its own counterterrorism actions have been more cautious, reflecting the multi-confessional demographics of several ASEAN states. At its January 2007 summit, ASEAN leaders signed their *first* convention on counterterrorism but insisted that “terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, or ethnic group.” Moreover, unlike the hardline American approach to terrorism, ASEAN pledged to try to rehabilitate and reintegrate convicted terrorists back into society.¹¹

Additionally, ASEAN states vary in their commitment to UN counterterrorism initiatives. While all ten ASEAN members now submit counterterrorism reports to the UN 1540 and 1373 Committees which deal with counterterrorism and WMD proliferation, most of these reports have been late, and some are superficial. The most comprehensive came from Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, while Cambodia, Laos, and Burma provided scanty documents. Additionally, although the majority of ASEAN members have signed on to the NPT, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, little progress has been made in ratification. With the notable exception of Singapore, export control systems of Southeast Asian states remain unsophisticated and weak.¹²

The Maritime Dimension of Southeast Asian Security.

Multilateral maritime security is an ASEAN priority. While the declaratory target is piracy, in effect, anti-piracy capabilities are much the same as those required for maritime counter-terrorism. In 2002, the ASEAN Work Program adopted in Kuala Lumpur called for information sharing on pirates and also the need to seek technical and financial assistance from dialogue partners, including Australia, Japan, and the United States. A major ARF meeting in March 2005 brought together maritime security experts to discuss applicable technologies for situational awareness. Singapore led in demonstrations of its advanced port security.¹³ The desire for anti-piracy (and counterterrorism) technical assistance receives additional support from the UN Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) Article 43 that provides for cooperation between user states and littoral states bordering a strait. The Malacca Straits states (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore) have asked user states to share the costs of ensuring maritime safety and security. International Maritime Organization meetings in Jakarta (2005) and Kuala Lumpur (2006) urged user countries to fulfill their UNCLOS obligations to share safety and security costs. However, only Japan has offered to contribute. Meanwhile, at the 2002 Kuala Lumpur meeting, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia tabled four projects that could be funded by user states: wreck removals, situational awareness buildups to respond to hazardous incidents, providing Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders to small ships, and replacement and maintenance of navigational aids.¹⁴ None of these was directly related to counterterrorism; nevertheless, implementation could establish a habit of cooperation.

The United States has been particularly interested in promoting naval cooperation. Its annual CARAT exercises with Southeast Asian navies have included surveillance, SLOC protection, and mine-countermeasures. Nevertheless, there exists a disjunction between the American navy's focus on littoral operations and expeditionary forces versus regional navies that are interested in sea-denial capabilities to defend their littorals. Moreover, Southeast Asian states have a strong commitment to sovereignty in their territorial seas that even extends to their EEZs. This jealous protection of sovereignty constitutes a significant obstacle to the cooperation needed for countering maritime piracy and terrorism. Moreover, piracy ranks relatively low among regional governments' priorities. Illegal fishing and smuggling rank higher because their financial and human costs are greater.¹⁵

When the U.S. Pacific Command announced a Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI) designed to call on available maritime forces to protect Southeast Asian SLOCs, Malaysia and Indonesia objected to the notion of patrols conducted by extra-regional countries. To preempt this project, Operation MALSINDO was devised whereby the three littoral Malacca Straits states would be responsible for Straits security. The first trilateral patrols were launched in July 2004. By 2006, 17 ships had been allocated to the patrols: seven from Indonesia, five from Malaysia, and five from Singapore. Yet these ships may only patrol within the territorial waters of their own states. No hot pursuit protocol has been devised. Instead, "reverse hot pursuit" agreements have been discussed among Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines which would allow the ships of one state to drive the ship being pursued into the coastal waters of a neighbor whose own navy (or coast guard) would be

waiting.¹⁶ In actuality, piracy in the Straits of Malacca as a proportion of straits traffic is quite low. Most pirates come from Indonesian waters and prey on fishing craft from communities on the Malaysian side. In August 2006, Lloyds Maritime Insurance was sufficiently assured that Southeast Asian piracy was under control that it lifted the insurance surcharge for ships transiting the Straits it had imposed a few years earlier.

In 2003, motivated by the prospect of North Korea providing WMD contraband to “rogue states” such as Syria and Iran, Washington inaugurated the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) with likeminded states that agreed to open their own flagged vessels for cargo inspection and to interdict suspicious ships when they entered the territorial waters of PSI members. Japan and Australia as well as Singapore were among the original PSI adherents. Exercises occur regularly on interdiction tactics.¹⁷ Indonesia and Malaysia see PSI as an encroachment on sovereignty, while the Philippines lacks the naval capability to participate. Other ASEAN PSI members include Brunei, Cambodia, and the Philippines though they have not participated.

Coast Guards have the potential for a greater role in maritime security along the Southeast Asian littoral. As maritime police rather than navies, they maintain a lower political profile and are less threatening to countries particularly sensitive to sovereignty. Indicative of Coast Guard agencies’ importance to Asia-Pacific security is the 2006 decision by the U.S.-led Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) to invite Coast Guards to participate in WPNS sea exercises. The Australian navy also exercised with a Japanese Coast Guard vessel in the 2003 Exercise *Pacific Protector* in the Coral Sea, a part of the PSI.¹⁸ For Southeast Asian navies, the littorals are vital

human and economic spaces that need to be protected against criminal and terrorist activities. Coast Guards are better equipped and trained for this role than western navies with expeditionary forces that view the littorals as a space from which large forces can leap from the sea to the land.¹⁹ These navies are not constabulary forces. Coast Guards are. Of the three trilateral countries, Japan's Coast Guard has been the most attentive to Southeast Asian needs. Tokyo trains Southeast Asian coast guard personnel in Japan and has hosted Port Security Seminars in Southeast Asia as well as working individually with Indonesia to help Jakarta create an independent coast guard.²⁰

U.S. Military Relations with Southeast Asia.

While it is clear that trilateral security coordination toward Southeast Asia is limited at best, individually, the United States, Australia, and Japan have assisted regional security development in ways that are mutually reinforcing. Unsurprisingly, Washington is more broadly and deeply involved in the region's security than its two allies with military assistance and joint exercises that began in the 1950s. In recent years, these exercises have stressed anti-piracy skills. U.S. Cooperation and Readiness Afloat (CARAT) exercises are annual events that pair American naval, marine, and coast guard elements with Southeast Asian partners from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, and Brunei. Similarly, the annual Southeast Asian Cooperation Against Terrorism (SEACAT) inaugurated in 2002 enhances cooperative responses to maritime terrorism and transnational crime. The United States also shares information on maritime activities in Southeast Asia with regional partners to strengthen "Maritime Domain Awareness." An interesting

feature of SEACAT exercises is that although primarily bilateral, the United States has held some of them simultaneously with more than one partner, providing multilateral value.^{20a}

The closest American security relationship is with its only former colony, the **Philippines**. During the Cold War, Philippine air and naval bases constituted key repair, R&R, and deployment positions for America's Pacific forces that could be dispatched either north for a Korean or China contingency or west to the Persian Gulf. The Cold War's end and rising Philippine nationalism led to the cancellation of this basing arrangement in 1992. However, a decade later, after 9/11, Washington and Manila renewed their security links as part of what Renato Cruz De Castro calls "the war of the third kind...a form of political violence waged by organizations other than the state against state actors."²¹ In the Philippines, a small but lethal Al Qaeda-linked terrorist group, Abu Sayyaf, and elements of a similar Indonesia-based terrorist organization, JI, became the impetus for a transformed Philippine-U.S. alliance. The United States did not attempt to renew the Philippine bases arrangement. Indeed, the new Philippine constitution prohibits the basing of foreign troops on Philippine territory and also forbids foreign soldiers from fighting alongside Philippine forces on the nation's soil—these restrictions a reaction to the overly close U.S. relationship with Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos prior to the expiration of the bases treaty.

For the United States, renewed security cooperation with the Philippines constituted an example of how Washington would work with allies and friends who were challenged by radical terrorist organizations. In the Philippine case, these included Islamist groups as well as Manila's more traditional protracted fight with the

communist New Peoples Army. Washington portrays its current security assistance to the Philippines comprising counterterrorist training, equipment, and civic action (medical and dental aid, the building of roads and schools in southern Philippine areas threatened by Abu Sayyaf, and construction of potable water supplies) as ways of assuring other Southeast Asian states that Al Qaeda will not be able to obtain sanctuaries in the ASEAN region. American actions in the Philippines constituted Washington's initial effort to engage ASEAN in cooperative security that addresses the transnational challenges of terrorism and piracy.²²

The Philippine government is aware of its own military shortfalls; the reduction of American military aid in the 1990s led to the obsolescence of most of the defense forces equipment. Counter-insurgency in the new century, therefore, requires a significant renewal of U.S. assistance to initiate military modernization. The political cost to the Arroyo administration has been negative reactions from nationalist politicians and leftist groups. U.S. aid has concentrated on building the Philippine capacity to suppress domestic insurgents. Unlike the Cold War period, aid has not been designed to help the Philippines defend against external threats. Therefore, Manila's ability to control its air and sea spaces has not been significantly augmented in the first decade of the 21st century.

In 2002, the Philippine –U.S. Mutual Defense Board agreed on a confidential Five Year Plan that provided for American training and equipment for a counter-insurgency Philippine Rapid Deployment Force. This agreement also included the construction of bases and arms caches. As these arrangements evolved over the decade, U.S. forces assisted their Philippine counterparts in field-intelligence through

technical means (UAVs, radio and electronic intercepts).²³ Several hundred American trainers are in the Philippines at any time. They come from the Pacific Command Special Forces. Philippine light reaction companies are trained by Americans in Mindanao and better equipped than regular Philippine army troops.²⁴

Counterterror operations in Mindanao are independent of the annual *Balikatan* exercises conducted under the Philippine-U.S. Defense Treaty. *Balikatan* has taken place primarily in Luzon and focuses on upgrading general Philippine armed forces sufficiently to engage in joint exercises with U.S. forces. However, Washington's primary interest continues to be counterterrorism in the south. In late 2006, the U.S. Navy offered to support and equip a Philippine coast watch system with radar to be put in place by 2008. Philippine Coast Guard personnel were sent to the United States to undergo antiterrorist training. Australian Special Forces are also contributing to this enterprise.²⁵

In the course of this close cooperation between U.S. Special Forces and Philippine soldiers, allegations were made by the respected Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism in a January 2007 report that U.S. personnel facilitated the rescue of hostages held by Abu Sayyaf and that the killing of two major Abu Sayyaf leaders in September 2006 occurred with the assistance of U.S. surveillance. If true, these activities would appear to be on the edge of legality insofar as American personnel were not directly involved in Philippine military action. The Philippine press regularly reports that FBI and CIA agents along with Australian police and intelligence work with the Philippine military to track down Abu Sayyaf and JI

militants. However, the Americans always insist that their actions stop short of direct participation in firefights.²⁶

Although the Philippine Constitution prohibits foreign bases, according to the Philippine press, the United States has established a small forward operating base in Sulu where pre-positioned equipment is maintained and a small number of rotational U.S. personnel are permanently deployed. The product of a U.S. Pacific Command concept, these “lily pads” would be available to U.S. forces for joint exercises with host countries and as supply points for military activities in the region, as required. The U.S. presence in Mindanao is strategically positioned near the Makassar Strait at the southwestern rim of the South China Sea. As for joint military exercises planned for 2008, this year’s *Balikatan* is devoted entirely to civic action in efforts to win the “hearts and minds” of poverty stricken populations—troops working with civilians on roads, sewer systems, and providing clinics. Nevertheless, complaints persist from human rights organizations that elements of the Philippine armed forces continue to engage in extra-judicial killings of leftists and journalists. These concerns have been incorporated into the most recent American military aid provisions, linking a portion of that aid to certification that the Philippine armed forces implement the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions.²⁷

As in the Philippines, **Indonesia**’s military capabilities eroded in the 1990s, partially as a result of the 1997-98 regional financial crisis. Although Indonesia along with Singapore and Malaysia constitute the Malacca Strait littoral, until recently, the United States did little to enhance Jakarta’s naval and air force capabilities. In its dealings with the Indonesian armed forces (TNI) the Bush administration took

advantage of U.S. sympathy for Indonesia's December 2004 tsunami travails by expressing the hope that International Military Education and Training (IMET) could be restored. This program was withdrawn in 1992 when the Indonesian military launched a bloody attack on proindependence protestors in East Timor. The sanctions were further tightened in 1999 when the Indonesian army was accused of directing the killing of some 1500 people in East Timor in an unsuccessful effort to prevent the territory's independence. The IMET ban was written into law by Congress in 2002 when U.S. lawmakers insisted that Indonesian generals were blocking an investigation into the killing of two U.S. school teachers in Papua province.

Subsequently, Indonesian authorities have taken steps to improve cooperation with the FBI and brought charges against a member of a Papuan separatist group for the killings of the two Americans. This development coincided with President Bush's stress on the importance of strengthening counterterrorism cooperation with Indonesia in a January 16, 2005 joint press conference with then Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. Indonesian Defense Minister Sudarsono announced that "my job is now to try to reconfigure the Indonesian defense force...so that it will be more accountable to democracy....[T]here's no excuse for some of their alleged human rights abuses that have been taking place over the past 25 years." Sudarsono went on to ask the U.S. to improve TNI training, "a very important part of consolidating democracy...." Wolfowitz concurred: "I think we need to think about how we can strengthen this new elected democratic government...to help build the kinds of defense institutions that will ensure...that the Indonesian military, like our

military, is [a] loyal function of democratic government.” Wolfowitz promised to raise the IMET issue again with Congress.

The U.S. Pacific Command had already reestablished some ties with the TNI by sponsoring a series of conferences on civil-military relations, democratic institutions, and nonlethal training—major components of IMET, which also includes combat training. The Pentagon argues that training in the United States can help create a more professional and disciplined force. However, the long hiatus in U.S.-Indonesian military relations increased sentiment within the TNI to steer clear of the U.S. because Washington stopped providing much of what it gave during the Cold War.²⁸

By the end of 2005, the United States restored military relations with Jakarta. The Bush administration persuaded Congress that the world’s most populous Muslim country, now a democracy, known for a predominantly moderate approach to Islam, was a key to Southeast Asian stability and security, especially since it sits astride the region’s vital sea lanes. The State Department announced a new plan to help modernize and reform the Indonesian armed forces. With U.S. arms sales once again available, the TNI declared the refurbishing of F-16s, F-5s, C-130s, and OV-10s “priorities.” The TNI also became the largest U.S. beneficiary of counterterrorism training combining local constabulary with Indonesian military personnel involved in over 100 events under the U.S. Pacific Command Theater Security Cooperation Program.²⁹

At the June 2007 annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Indonesian Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono summed up Jakarta’s view of U.S. armed forces by noting that America “remains the security provider” with “the largest number of ships, planes, and missiles in the Asia-Pacific.” However, Juwono also pointed out that China and

Japan were developing capabilities “to codetermine the terms and conditions of western Pacific security....” In March and April 2007, the Indonesian and U.S. Armies and Marine Corps signed agreements for joint training at the brigade level with an emphasis on UN peacekeeping operations. By 2008, U.S. military aid for Indonesia had increased to \$15.7 million, though part of that sum was contingent on Jakarta’s willingness to account for past human rights abuses by the TNI. For anti-piracy and coastal patrol operations, in January 2008, Washington provided the Indonesian police with 15 new patrol boats.³⁰

The other states abutting the Malacca Straits and the South China Sea, **Singapore**, **Malaysia**, and **Thailand**, have also received U.S. security assistance. Although Thailand, as the Philippines, has been designated a “major non-NATO ally” and provides the location for the Pacific Command’s largest annual Southeast Asian exercise, *Cobra Gold*, nevertheless, Washington’s closest security partner arguably is Singapore. When the United States abandoned the Philippine bases, Singapore offered American forces access to its air and naval facilities, including Changi Naval Base’s deep water pier, sufficient for Nimitz-class aircraft carriers. In 2005, this multi-layered defense relationship was formalized via a Closer Cooperation Partnership in Defense and Security that covered counterterrorism, military exercises, and defense technology. Singapore is also an active participant in the PSI and Container Security Initiative and is the only ASEAN state to sign on to the development of the American Joint Strike Fighter (F-35) project. The island state has also set up radiation detection devices at container ports and tightened air cargo security. In late 2005, Singapore’s air force and navy carried out their

first combined exercise at 29 Palms, California, on the U.S. military reservation—though how desert warfare fits Southeast Asia’s jungle environment is something of a mystery.³¹

Although Malaysian and U.S. political relations can sometimes be testy, military links are positive. In April 2007, Malaysian defense chief Gen. Abdul Aziz Zainal praised the long standing cooperation between the two countries armed forces in training, joint exercises, and intelligence sharing and went on to say that Malaysia would welcome more U.S. navy port calls. Although Malaysia has not signed on to the PSI, it has sent observers to PSI exercises.³² Kuala Lumpur is also planning to acquire additional F-18s for its airforce.

As for Thailand, the United States by law had to significantly cut a relatively small military assistance program in the wake of the September 2006 military coup. Nevertheless, the multinational *Cobra Gold* exercise was held in 2007, and counterterrorism aid continued even while the Thai military was in power. Elections in late 2007 and the formation of a new democratically elected government has led to the restoration of military assistance, including the IMET program in 2008. On a separate dimension, in April 2007, U.S. Special Operations commander in the Pacific, Maj. Gen. David Fridovich offered to help train Thai forces in counterinsurgency, citing the effective relationship between U.S. Special Operations trainers and the Philippine military in Mindanao. Thai army troops have been attempting to suppress a virulent Muslim insurgency in its southern provinces since early 2004 with no success. The Thai government immediately declined the American offer with critics saying any direct U.S. involvement would only exacerbate the problem. However, Thai Army Commander

Gen. Sonthi Boonyaratglin stated he would appreciate access to U.S. intelligence, especially on foreign financial contributions to insurgents.³³

Malacca Straits Security—A Multinational Enterprise.

Australia, Japan, and the United States, as the littoral states, are concerned about the future safety and security of the Malacca Straits. Nevertheless, prior to 2004, the littorals displayed little enthusiasm for trilateral security measures, owing to differing threat perceptions and heightened sensitivity over sovereignty issues. For Singapore, international trade is its life blood. Any threat to that trade is literally existential. Therefore, both security cooperation among the littorals and assistance from Western navies to keep the Malacca Straits open are welcome to the city-state. Moreover, Singapore believes it has been targeted by Al Qaeda because of the city-state's close links to the United States and because Western countries have major business interests in Singapore.^{33a}

By contrast, neither Malaysia nor Indonesia place either maritime terrorism or piracy at the top of their security agendas. For Malaysia, the main maritime security challenges are illegal trafficking in people, small arms, and narcotics. Although piracy is a concern, Malaysian authorities note that most Southeast Asian attacks originate in Indonesia where governance, socio-economic conditions, as well as the professionalism and capabilities of security are much lower than Malaysia's. For Indonesia, the central maritime security challenges are illegal fishing and smuggling. Indonesia derives fewer economic benefits from the Straits than either Malaysia or Singapore. Most ships entering the Straits are either transiting in either direction or heading for ports in

Singapore and Malaysia. Nor does Indonesia accept the piracy-terrorism nexus underlying Singapore's Straits policy and to a smaller degree, Malaysia's.^{33b}

In contrast to Somalian coastal waters, for the past few years, piracy has been down along the Malacca Straits; in 2008, the lowest number of incidents in years.^{33c} (See discussion above.) While Indonesia's remote Anombas islands have been the source of small scale attacks on fishing trawlers and islands in the southern Philippines contain Muslim insurgents who sometimes engage in maritime crimes, Malacca Straits traffic flows unimpeded. Unlike the Somali pirates who are well armed and organized with safe havens along the Somali coast, Southeast Asian pirates tend to be Indonesian fishermen who have fallen on hard time. For the most part, they rob crew members but seldom attempt to seize the vessels they board.^{33d}

For several years, the Malacca Straits states—with which Thailand is now participating-- conducted parallel though independent anti-piracy patrols. In 2005, these efforts were enhanced through greater coordination (discussed above). These efforts now include an "Eyes in the Sky" component by which one country's surveillance aircraft with personnel from the other three littoral states on board monitor suspicious maritime activity and notify their respective navies to take action. The United States offered to assist these efforts. Singapore endorsed the American offer, but Malaysia and Indonesia demurred, saying that direct U.S. involvement would violate their sovereignty. Nevertheless, Malaysian defense minister Najib stated that the U.S. would be welcome to provide aircraft for "Eyes in the Sky" as long as the personnel on board were exclusively from the straits states.³⁴

In January 2007, Admiral Mike Mullen, then the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, in a Singapore visit, praised the coordinated Malacca Straits states' anti-piracy patrols as a "model maritime network" and offered U.S. information technology. (Incorporating the naval capabilities of friendly states in a common security endeavor is the concept behind Admiral Mullen's "thousand ship navy.") Subsequently, in March, then Commander for the U.S. Pacific Fleet Admiral Gary Roughead stated there was no need for the U.S. navy to patrol the straits because the littoral states were "doing very well. We cooperate closely with these countries."

Nevertheless, several observers question the effectiveness of the littorals' endeavors, suggesting they are more show than substance and pointing out that airborne surveillance is of little use since these observations cannot be transmitted in real time to forces on the surface. Although steps were taken in 2006 to link surface and air patrols via an agreement among the littorals, there is little evidence to show the situation has changed. Moreover, the air patrols occur only during the day; and most piracy is a night time activity.^{34a}

Singapore takes maritime security threats more seriously than its neighbors, requiring that all vessels in the Singapore Strait be equipped with identification transponders. Singapore Navy security teams also deploy on selected ships entering the city-state's waters. In late 2005, Malaysia created a national coast guard and placed armed police aboard ships carrying high value cargo through Malaysian waters. Indonesia, too, is increasing maritime patrols and has requested more patrol boats from South Korea and Japan.

The littoral states have been pressing users of the Malacca Straits to contribute a fair share of the costs needed to ensure their navigational safety. Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak in mid-March 2007 stated that user states that want to see better safety arrangements should help finance their upgrade. He praised Japan's Nippon Foundation, which has proposed a special fund to which shipping companies could contribute to finance navigational aids and the removal of shipwrecks from the Straits. In November 2008, shipping industry members and some user states agreed to contribute \$5.4 million to assist the littoral states with Straits security. The money will go to the Aids to Navigation Fund (ANF). Japan continues to be the largest contributor with additional pledges from the United Arab Emirates and South Korea. The ANF has set its 2009 budget at \$8 million for the upkeep of 51 navigational aids along the Straits. At the end of 2008, however, the Fund was \$2.6 million short. The United States has financed four reconnaissance radars along the Makassar Strait, used particularly by large tankers as an alternative to Malacca. And, Washington has also provided 15 high-speed patrol boats to Indonesia, some of which are based at Batam opposite Singapore—a vulnerable choke point. Focusing on Indonesia's needs, Washington is funding a tactical communications center in Jakarta in addition to the radar installations along the northern Sumatra coast.^{34b}

A separate U.S. exercise, Southeast Asia Cooperation Against Terrorism (SEACAT), was held in mid-August 2007 involving navies from Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand with U.S. ships from the Seventh Fleet. In this exercise, each Southeast Asian navy steamed bilaterally with the U.S. ships in a variety of scenarios. For example, the Singapore exercise focused on the tracking o

ships transiting through the Singapore Strait as well as an anti-terrorist simulation involving the hijacking of a merchant ship.³⁵

The Japanese and Australian Roles in Southeast Asian Security.

Unlike more broad-gauged American security relations with Southeast Asia, Japan and Australia have focused on counterterrorism and transnational crime. Canberra has entered into security agreements with Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, while Japan has been concerned primarily with assistance in the maintenance of open SLOCs. Australia is a key partner in the longstanding 1971 Five Power Defense Arrangement (FPDA) with the UK, New Zealand, Singapore, and Malaysia. The FPDA Integrated Air Defense System provides for the rotation of combat aircraft from all five states to Malaysia's Butterworth Air Force Base. FPDA armed forces exercise together annually. However, the only Southeast Asia relationship Australia dominates is with East Timor. Canberra is its ally and guarantor, intervening when Dili seemed on the verge of political chaos in May 2006 and again in February 2008. Australia's position in East Timor complicates its relations with Indonesia, though common counterterrorism needs, especially after the 2002 Bali bombings, have led to renewed military and police ties. On February 7, 2008, Jakarta and Canberra ratified a 2006 agreement on counterterror, intelligence, and maritime security cooperation scheduled to run until 2011.

Security relations with Singapore are very close. The two countries' armed forces are the most advanced and capable in the region. Personnel exchanges are high, and Singapore armed forces regularly train in Australia, prepositioning some equipment at Australian training areas. The Singapore Air Force has operated a pilot training facility

in western Australia since 1993, and in August 2005, Singapore was given access to the Shoalwater Bay Training Area in Queensland where they may deploy up to 6600 personnel and their equipment for up to 45 days each year through 2009. Australia has also provided military equipment to Southeast Asian states, in May 2007, donating 28 high-speed gunboats to the Philippine navy for use in its southern waterways. Australia, the United States, and the Philippines are particularly concerned about sea boundaries between Borneo and the Philippines where smuggling, pirates, human trafficking, and JI militants cross at will. With Australia's help, the Philippines is also setting up 17 coastal watch stations from Palawan to Davao Province equipped with fast patrol boats and helicopters.³⁶

For Japan, dealing with piracy in Southeast Asia has been its primary security concern. As early as 2000, Japan convened a conference of regional coast guards to discuss mutual anti-piracy measures. The most recent achievement was the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia. By 2007, 14 countries had ratified the agreement, including Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam alongside Japan. To formalize this collaboration, an Information Sharing Center was established in Singapore in November 2006 to which Japan's Coast Guard (JCG) has assigned personnel. Japan has also sent three patrol ships to Indonesia as part of its counter-piracy and counterterrorism program, implying that this did not constitute a prohibited weapons export but rather support for the maritime police, permitted under Japanese law.³⁷ From 2006, Japan has helped the Malaysian maritime forces with a variety of tracking devices, high capacity computers, and advanced radio communication systems. Tokyo also pledged \$15 million

for Indonesian patrol craft. In late 2008, Japan appropriated \$15.6 million toward the Enhancement of Vessel Traffic System in the Malacca and Singapore Straits. The money is for a vessel traffic system center in Batam that will oversee traffic safety and security in the Straits.^{37a}

According to Richard Samuels, the JCG has changed the rules of naval engagement, asserted new maritime rights, circumvented the ban on arms exports, and has moved toward the “right of collective self defense, a capability Japan had long denied itself.”³⁸ The JCG now deploys a special operations unit dedicated to counterterrorism operations. A 2006 JCG White Paper listed “securing the safety of the sea lanes” among its core missions. This is the basis for assisting Southeast Asian states with training and technology to help police the Malacca Straits.³⁹

Conclusion.

The trilateral countries and Singapore would like to “securitize” anti-piracy efforts in Southeast Asia by linking them to counterterrorism. This linkage would make maritime security cooperation a part of the national security strategies of Southeast Asian participants alongside Washington, Tokyo, and Canberra. However, the other ASEAN members do not concur. Protective of their sovereign prerogatives, they insist that piracy and maritime terrorism should not be conflated and that piracy is a criminal activity, therefore, subject to national criminal jurisdictions. No external powers should be involved in suppressing pirates.⁴⁰ In effect, this means that Southeast Asian states will limit American, Australian, and Japanese security activities to technical assistance,

financial support for regional armed forces, training of coast guards, and naval and air joint exercises—the last dominated by the United States.

Singapore remains the exception as the only ASEAN state whose armed forces qualitatively match those of the trilateral members. Singapore's interest in playing in the “big leagues” was dramatically demonstrated in *Malabar-07-02*. In the largest multinational Asian naval exercise in decades, Singapore joined large naval contingents from the U.S., India, Japan and Australia from September 4-9, 2007 in the eastern Indian Ocean. While the 12 previous *Malabar* exercises were exclusively bilateral events conducted by India and the U.S. in the western Indian Ocean, this set of war games was held in the Bay of Bengal off the Andaman islands and near the western entrance to the Malacca Straits. It featured over 30 warships and 200 aircraft from the five nations. Singapore sent its most modern frigate, while the U.S. deployed two aircraft carriers, the *USS Nimitz* and *USS Kittyhawk*, a nuclear submarine, two guided-missile cruisers, and two guided-missile destroyers. India provided its single aircraft carrier, *INS Virant*, and a number of surface combatants, Japan two warships, and Australia a frigate and a tanker.

The exercises had a range of scenarios including mock air battles involving Indian and U.S. carriers, sea strikes near the Malacca Strait, as well as anti-piracy and anti-gunrunning drills off the Andaman island chain. The exercise came at a time when the then U.S. chief of naval operations, Adm. Mullen, called for a “1000 ship navy” consisting of countries that have a common concern in protecting the SLOCs from piracy and illegal trafficking as well as the proliferation of WMD. Humanitarian relief from the seas was also a component of the exercise.

Some analysts have described *Malabar-07-02* as a response to China's "string of pearls" strategy, whereby the PLA Navy has gained access to Indian Ocean ports of Burma and Bangladesh. Others see the exercise as the beginning of an "alliance" of Asian democracies. However, the commander of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, Vice Admiral Doug Crowder, underplayed these speculations, insisting that the war games held not far from Burma, were directed against no country but rather provided for the common good of keeping the sea lanes open for international commerce. Similarly, the commander of U.S. Pacific Command, Adm. Keating, stated: "There is no—let me emphasize no—effort on our part or any of those countries' parts, I'm sure, to isolate China...." The high-level American assurances followed angry expressions from Beijing that the war games constituted an effort to "contain" it in the Asia-Pacific region. Nevertheless, the U.S., Australia, Japan, and India are all engaging in strategic consultations that began on the sidelines of the May 2007 ARF meeting in Manila.

Whether *Malabar-07-02* will be a one off event or the beginning of more elaborate multinational security exercises in and around Southeast Asia remains to be seen. ASEAN members will view future exercises involving large numbers of external forces with some anxiety as a potential encroachment on their responsibilities for the maintenance of security in their own neighborhoods. External assistance to build these capacities continues to be welcome as can be seen in current arms sale to ASEAN armed forces. However, any external efforts to usurp regional security roles will be resisted. For the trilateral states a balance must be struck with Southeast Asia whereby regional strategic interests are supported but not replaced.

Finally, mention should be made of multinational security efforts involving both littoral and user states, particularly the 2004 Japan-initiated Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP). This arrangement includes the ten ASEAN states, Japan, China, South Korea, India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. It brought Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Northeast Asia together for the first time on maritime security. ReCAAP involves three kinds of activities: information sharing, capacity building, and operational cooperation. An Information Sharing Center (ISC) is its centerpiece whose primary purpose is to improve incident response. Both because of its central location and modern communications, Singapore was chosen to host the Center. As a result of Singapore's selection, however, neither Indonesia nor Malaysia has ratified the agreement. Jakarta felt insulted because it sees itself as *primus inter pares* among the ASEAN states; and Malaysia feared that ReCAAP would overshadow Kuala Lumpur's International Maritime Bureau. Singapore financed the entire start-up costs of the ISC, \$1.1 million.⁴¹ Note, too, that not only is the United States not involved in ReCAAP but also that the Agreement was struck in part as a way of avoiding unilateral American decisions on regional security taken without much consultation with the region's members.

Potential exists for greater cooperation among user states—not only the United States, Japan, and Australia but also possibly China and India—to enhance economic development projects in Indonesia and the southern Philippines with an emphasis on improving governance. As this paper demonstrates, capacity building is occurring in the Straits states with assistance from user governments; but this capacity building remains exclusively bilateral between the donors and recipient countries. A greater focus by the

donors on helping Indonesia and the Philippines particularly improve communication, surveillance, and coastal interdiction capabilities would significantly contribute to Southeast Asian Straits' safety and security. ASEAN's new Charter has a strong maritime component in the prospective ASEAN Security Community (ASC). Collaborative external support for littoral states' joint patrols could go a long way toward the realization of the ASC .

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